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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, December 25, 1940.
(Christmas Day)

(For Broadcast Use Only)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS." Information from the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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"Peace and good will to men" this Christmas Day is surely uppermost in everyone's mind in these troubled times. But I hope it has also been a merry Christmas within the four walls of each home. A Christmas with a cheery atmosphere, and a gift-laden tree, and a big turkey for dinner.

It is probably a better Christmas than usual for many of the folks outside of your four walls, because of that gift-laden tree. As you look over the things Santa brought to the different members of the family, I wonder how many you have found that were made by rural craftsmen,- and craftswomen? Lovely hand wrought gifts which have brought the makers much pleasure and some income for themselves, as well as the pleasure they have given the receivers and the givers. Christmas "good will" can take the form of enabling others to enjoy their Christmas.

In a number of States there has been a recent revival of these old-fashioned country handicrafts. The extension forces in these States have been asked to help teach some of the old skills, and to help with the problems of marketing the results. They have discovered almost forgotten arts like weaving cotton, linen or woolen cloth on homemade looms. They've encouraged new and original ideas in line with fashion trends-- like making odd buttons and buckles for women's dresses out of nuts, - boutonnières from pine cones and other plant materials. They've given impetus to established rural crafts like rug-making and basketry. And in various places they've organized exhibits of such work where city people can compare these interesting products with other examples of American arts and crafts.

The Christmas season is a good time to call attention to all this rural handiwork, because so many people look about for unusual gifts for their friends, and many others like to feel that their purchases will enable the craft workers to have a better Christmas themselves. But rural handicraft products are by no means limited to the Christmas season. They are made the year around. In regions which are popular for vacation trips- like Florida in winter or New England in summer, or the southwest and northwest at almost all seasons,- tourists are delighted to find souvenirs that are typical of the prevailing arts and crafts.

The county home demonstration agents know the farm women who do unusual types of craft work in the county. The State extension specialist in home furnishings or home management also knows which counties have such handicraft workers, so it is entirely possible to get in touch with someone who can make the odd or unusual gift you found on your Christmas tree today.

For example, if somebody gave you some hand-woven, hand-dyed table runners or guest towels, they may have come from North Carolina or the mountainous areas of eastern Tennessee or southwestern Virginia. The yarns are usually dyed with natural, or vegetable dyes which farm women know how to make from different wild plants. Colors from these vegetable dyes are especially soft and pleasing. That length of rust-colored hand-woven wool dress fabric was probably from the loom of some farm woman in eastern Pennsylvania.

If you received an odd shaped hearth brush made of pineneedles or broomsedge it came most likely from one of the southern States-- Kentucky, or Florida, or Mississippi, perhaps. Country women all through the south make ingenious use of their native long leaf pine and other wild plant materials. Little pine cones and spruce cuttings make attractive buttonhole bouquets for coats, either in their natural colors, or painted in bright hues. Lovely baskets and trays are made from long leaf pine in Mississippi and Florida. Georgia rural women know how to work

wonders with willow. Possibly your gifts this Christmas included a willow covered sewing or picnic basket.

Both Connecticut and New Mexico grow large ears of colored corn- red, black, blue and white, golden and white, black and white. Farm women who have fastened five or six of these colorful ears together by braiding the husks have found a ready market for their colorful ornaments for the dining-room or camp living-room.

Some of the New England rural people have established handicraft centers where they meet and carve interesting animals and figures out of wood or learn to hammer and etch copper and brass or make beaten silver costume jewelry. In the southwest there are also many metal craft workers, who turn to Mexican or Indian art for their inspiration. There is a well-known group of wood carvers in North Carolina. Native clay in North Carolina and Louisiana is transformed into artistic pottery by rural craftsmen.

But among all the handicraft Christmas gifts you may have received, I do hope there was at least one corn shuck doll from Tennessee. Only one woman makes the famous "Molly" doll, but there are many other corn shuck character dolls - mountain boys and girls, nuns, negro mammies, children, and others.

Let's hope that the makers of all these handicraft articles were rewarded by a happy time this Christmas day; and let's remember them all through the year when we're looking for quaint and unusual things for our homes or for gifts. The State extension service can tell you what is being made in your State, and possibly tell you also where to go to see examples of the work. Whatever you choose will help make it a prosperous New Year for the makers. And your extension agent can also tell you whether there are any craft projects in the homemakers' clubs, if you happen to be one of those who would like to take up a new craft as a hobby. Here's wishing you a Happy New Year.

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